

FAQs About LEED for HOMES

For Cascadia Regional GBC: Buildings in Balance

Background: As part of the Cascadia GBC's Buildings in Balance Series, a two-hour seminar was held on Friday, July 7th, focused on LEED for Homes, and presented by Kathleen O'Brien of O'Brien & Company. The audience, which was standing room only, was quite engaged and excited about the new rating system. Approximately half of the 80 attendees represented practitioners who might implement the rating system; about half were jurisdictional types that wanted practitioners to implement the rating system and assist with that process.

There was quite an active Q&A dynamic going; most questions were handled on the spot. A few were posted by Kathleen on a flip chart, with the promise to get back to the attendees later. Thor Peterson of the City of Seattle and representing the CRGBC Seattle branch committed to providing it electronically as an FAQ by posting it on the City and/or CRGBC's website.

Answers were provided by Ann Edminster, member and former co-chair of the national LEED for Homes Committee; Alistair Jackson, staff of O'Brien & Company and a rater for the LEED for Homes in Washington State; and Kathleen O'Brien. They were reviewed by Jay Hall, and Emily Mitchell, LEED for Homes/USGBC Staff.

Questions

Do we expect the average size (0 points impact) band for house size be adjusted to the actual national average and how often?

Based on lessons learned in the pilot, it is most likely that this credit (MR 1) will be revised in the next couple of months. Thereafter, the Rating System will be updated on a continuous improvement basis. As better information becomes available on the relationship between home size and resource use, we will most certainly update this credit. With respect to updating the national average home size, we have not made any decisions on this yet - although we certainly will revisit the market trend data periodically.

How does the "no additional lumber" address cases of historic/cultural design, in particular on an infill project in a historic neighborhood or a gut rehab of a historic building.?

This credit has been revised to a 10% cap on the waste factor in the lumber order, so the "additional lumber" language is no longer moot.

How does LEED for Homes apply to historic homes?

The LEED for Homes rating system can be used for gut rehabs of homes, including historic homes. LEED for Homes is evaluating innovation applications for deconstruction of existing (e.g., historical) homes on a case-by-case basis and may consider establishing some performance threshold for deconstruction in a future version of LEED for Homes. In addition, wood salvaged from historic homes may be reused in new construction.

How is material salvaged from deconstruction treated (is it salvaged? Resource reuse?)

Salvaged or reused material is eligible for recognition under MR5, Environmentally Preferable Products; in cases where it is not listed as an alternative for a given building component, the builder should submit a credit interpretation request for consideration by the MR-TASC. If the quantity of materials being reused is substantial enough (i.e., comparable in magnitude to the other measures in MR 5), the request for an ID credit will be granted.

Is a list of builders participating in the pilots available? If not now, when?

USGBC has asked the pilot builders if they are open to having their contact information made public; a response is expected in coming weeks. USGBC plans to post this information on the LEED for Homes website at www.usgbc.org/leed/homes.

What are the registration fees? There is a \$150 fee for project registration, with \$50 per unit for certification.

Those are fees due to USGBC from builder. Other applicable fees (e.g., for certification services) are at the discretion of the Provider. Fees for the third-party certification will vary with the level of experience of the green home builder, the home size, the desired certification level (i.e., Certified, Silver, Gold, or Platinum), and the distance that the third party has to travel to conduct site visits at the LEED Home. Earth Advantage (EA), Portland is the Provider in the Northwest. O'Brien & Company has been contracted by EA to represent perform ratings on its behalf in Washington.

Can verification be done by the same person doing technical assistance/consulting? (Who's doing quality control of verifiers?)

The official certifier of LEED Homes is an authorized LEED for Homes Provider. All LEED raters or verifiers must be contracted to a LEED for Homes Provider. It is up to the discretion of the Provider to determine who is qualified to deliver on-site verification services. Providers are responsible for recruiting, training, and supervising qualified LEED raters in their local markets. LEED Home raters must meet qualifying criteria. In particular, since LEED for Homes requires ENERGY STAR for Homes qualification, the rater must be qualified by ENERGY STAR NW through its performance testing and verification training.

Also, all individuals offering verification services related to LEED for Homes are required to submit a declaration stating possible conflicts of interest. This declaration needs to be provided to the builder and any other parties who might be affected by potential conflicts of interest.

As pilot raters in Washington, O'Brien & Company is providing some guidance to design teams to help them leverage integration opportunities and optimize their design. O'Brien and Company works under the supervision of the LEED for Home Provider Earth Advantage.

Why won't LEED Home Builders be able to hang their hats on a LEED AP? We should be able to use that Brand.

The current LEED AP designation does not indicate any familiarity with LEED for Homes; rather, it represents knowledge of other LEED rating systems, which relate to commercial buildings. USGBC is considering whether to develop a comparable exam and credential for professionals who are conversant with LEED for Homes. Currently, qualified LEED for Homes support is available to builders via their local Providers. LEED APs that are qualified in green home building are encouraged to develop business relationships with the LEED for Homes Provider in the markets that they serve.

Will there be a LEED for remodels?

The challenge with a LEED program for remodeling is that remodeling by its nature is a "one-off" business, with few economies of scale and in most cases, no buyer (in most cases, the client already owns the home). Thus, the remodeling market poses challenges with respect to the creation of a viable (i.e., sustainable) business model for USGBC. Further, the LEED Rating Systems are generally used to assess the whole of a building. In remodeling, only parts of the home are affected. Thus, it is difficult to assess the greenness of a building when only part of it has been upgraded. For the time being, we suggest that remodelers use LEED for Homes to provide guidance with respect to the goals and principles -- and in some cases, e.g., plumbing fixtures, performance specifications -- that can be referred to in the remodeling process. USGBC may tackle the remodeling market sometime in the future. Note that LEED for Homes can be used for gut rehabs.

Will there be a LEED for existing homes (recertification process) given frequent turnover?

This represents a challenge similar to remodeling; and besides the fact that there are no economies of scale, it remains to be seen whether there is any significant demand potential. Since the seller is the homeowner and not a builder, s/he stands to gain no professional reputation benefit by offering the LEED brand. In the future LEED may achieve sufficient consumer brand recognition that prospective buyers will look for a LEED label on a used home as well as a new one -- and be willing to pay for it -- but it's likely to be quite a few years before that happens.